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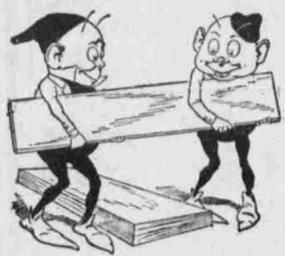
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Making Money On the Farm

VI.—Seed Corn Breeding

By C. V. GREGORY,
Author of "Home Course in Modern Agriculture"
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In the preceding articles improved methods of growing a few of the most widely grown farm crops have been given. By study and careful attention to details it is possible for a farmer to make a good profit raising common produce for the general market. Much greater returns, however, may be obtained by specializing in some particular line and selling the products on a special market.

One of the most profitable special lines that can be followed is breeding improved seed corn. This is some-



FIG. XI—GOOD TYPE OF KERNEL.

thing that must be done for every locality, since corn shipped in from any distance cannot be relied on. It is entirely possible to increase the yielding ability of a strain of corn ten bushels to the acre or more by a very few years' breeding. Seed from such an improved strain will find a ready market at satisfactory figures.

Selection of Ears.

In starting out to improve a strain of corn there are two main points to be considered—yield and quality. The quality can be determined readily by inspecting the ears. In examining the ears the following five points are to be looked for: (1) General appearance. The ear should be as large as it can be and still be sure to get ripe every year. It should be straight, symmetrical and not taper too abruptly. The butts and tips should be fairly well filled, though other more important points should not be sacrificed for this. (2) True type. Every established breed of corn has its peculiarities of shape, color, etc., that must be considered. The general type of the breed should be adhered to closely, as uniformity is an indication of breeding. (3) Maturity. No ear should be used for seed that is not sound and well matured. Soft, chaffy, starchy kernels or those shrunken at the tip, with chaff adhering to them, are indications of immaturity. Deep kernels go with late maturing corn. Extreme depth of kernel cannot be expected in the early varieties that must be grown in the north. (4) Vitality. While all corn should be tested before it is planted, yet there are many ears that can be thrown out without the trouble of testing. Immature ears are usually lacking in vitality. If the kernels are blistered on the back or the embryo is dark or yellowish the chances are that it will not grow. (5) Shelling percentage. A high percentage of corn to cob is desirable, but should be secured by compact, fairly deep kernels rather than by an abnormally small cob.

Increasing the Yield.

While quality is important, yield is even more so. This is not so easily determined, actual field tests being required. Before starting these tests the breed of corn to be grown should be selected. It pays to begin work with the best corn obtainable, as you are thus starting where some one else has left off. A breed of corn that has proved itself adapted to your locality is the best to select.

There are almost as many methods of breeding seed corn as there are corn breeders. Many of these are too complicated to be adapted to the farmer who is just starting in as a corn breeder. After a few years' experience with a simpler method, some of the plans for keeping a record of each ear from year to year and producing "pedigreed" seed corn may be employed.

The breeding plot should be 500 to 600 feet long—just long enough so that it takes an ear to plant a row. It should be wide enough for about fifty of these rows. The soil and drainage conditions of the plot should be as nearly uniform as possible. It should be located twenty to forty rods from any other corn, so that there will be no danger of mixing. Fifty of the best ears of the desired strain should be selected and shelled separately. Each of the rows in the breeding plot is to be planted with one of these ears. The work can be done with a planter if care is taken to clean out the boxes

thoroughly each time across. It is better to drill the corn in the breeding plot since it is too narrow to cultivate to advantage crosswise. Two or three border rows should be planted around the edges of the plot.

Care of the Breeding Plot.

The breeding plot should not be fertilized any better than any of the other fields on the farm, and the preparation of the seed bed and cultivation should be the same. The prime object is to develop a strain of corn that will yield well under average field conditions. The extra work that is put on the breeding plot should be applied to the corn itself and not to the soil. About the time cultivation ceases all suckers should be cut off. This can be quickly done with a straight bladed corn knife. These suckers take nourishment needed by the good stalks and produce inferior pollen to fertilize the silks.

The most important part of the work is detasseling. When the tassels begin to appear go through the plot and carefully pull them out from every other row. This should be done every day for a week or more—as long as tassels continue to appear. At the same time any imperfect stalks in the other rows should be detasseled. If there are any rows that show a marked tendency to sucker, carry the ears too high or low or have any other marked defect, they should be detasseled also.

Comparing the Yields.

As soon as the corn is all ripe the ears from the twenty-five detasseled rows should be husked, keeping the produce of each row separate. The corn from the tasseled rows, as well as from the imperfect rows that were detasseled and from the border rows, should be discarded. At the time of husking the detasseled corn any peculiarity of the stalks in a row should be noted. The number of stalks in each row should also be counted. The weight of the corn from a row divided by the number of stalks in that row will give the weight per stalk, which is the proper basis for comparison. It will be found that there is a very great difference in yielding ability, some rows yielding twice or three times as much as others. This yield, together with the number of good seed ears to the row, forms the basis for determining from which row to select ears to plant next year's breeding plot. The rest of the ears worth saving should be stored away to plant in the increase field.

The increase field is not for the purpose of improving the corn, but merely to secure larger quantities of that which has been improved in the breeding plot. Each year seed from the highest quality and best yielding of the individual rows is saved to plant the next year's breeding plot and the remainder used in the increase field. In this way the standard keeps improving from year to year. Ten bushels to the acre increase is by no means the limit to which the improvement can be carried. Indeed, almost the only limit is the care and time bestowed upon the breeding plot.

The Seed Corn House.

Where several hundred bushels of corn are to be saved for seed, as is the case where a specialty is being made of well bred seed corn, it is necessary to have some sort of special seed corn house. This may be filled with slatted racks, on which the corn is laid, or the ears may be hung from the ceiling with binder twine. The latter is the better method, as it permits a more thorough circulation of air around the corn. The use of two



FIG. XII—GOOD HILL OF CORN.

strings, one at each end of the ear, keeps it from warping, as it will warp if tied by one string in the middle.

One of the chief requirements of a seed corn house is adequate ventilation. In the northern section where severe cold weather comes early some artificial heat will be needed. The corn may be hung in the seed house as soon as it is gathered. At this time it contains a large amount of moisture, so the windows should all be opened to allow it to dry rapidly. Artificial heat should be applied gradually at first, as too much when the corn is full of moisture will injure it. After the corn is well dried out less ventilation will be needed, though some should be given at all times. Heat will be needed from this time on only on very cold or damp days.

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